



Directorate of  
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**Near East and  
South Asia Review**

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*Special Issue: Foreign Military Personnel  
in the Middle East and South Asia*

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Supplement  
18 July 1986

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Article

**Libyan Armed Forces: Surviving on Foreign Support**

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Near East and  
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Special Issue: Foreign Military Personnel  
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Libyan Armed Forces:  
Surviving on  
Foreign Support

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Foreigners provide vital support to Libya's military. We estimate that over 3,500 advisers, instructors, and technicians from the USSR, Eastern Europe, Syria, France, Italy, and Iran work with the Libyan armed forces. Nearly all sophisticated military maintenance is performed by these people. They teach in Libya's major military schools and on individual pieces of equipment. They influence Libyan military planning and doctrine.

We believe that, in all instances, Libya pays cash or oil for foreign experts. This usually involves paying the wages and bonuses of the individuals. In the cases where the foreign personnel are part of broader defense cooperation, payment can also include a range of political, military, and economic compensations.

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Three types of arrangements have secured this foreign support:

- Most of Libya's arms purchase agreements include provisions for the supplier to provide maintenance and training in Libya.
- Damascus, and possibly Tehran, provide military personnel as part of bilateral defense cooperation.
- The Soviet presence includes both personnel associated with specific types of equipment and personnel provided as part of broad support to Libya's defense.

**The Soviet Presence**  
We estimate that about 2,000 Soviet advisers and technicians provide essential instructional, planning, and maintenance assistance to Libya's military establishment. They are found in the Army and Air Defense Force down to the battalion level, in Libya's military schools, with many Navy and Air Force squadrons, and with the major staffs. We have no information indicating that they have manned any weapon system for the Libyans.

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The Soviets have had a profound influence on Libya's military planning. For example, the Libyan Army is in the process of reorganizing along Soviet lines, with battalions and brigades similar in size and composition to their Soviet counterparts.

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for years Libya has recruited foreigners to serve in its forces. Many of these individuals are fully integrated into one of Libya's services and function as if they were Libyan. Most are there for the personal income. Since they serve as individuals and do not represent their home countries, they are not discussed in this article.

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The Soviets' work with Libya's Air Defense Force this year offers a good example of the range of services they provide. [redacted] early in the year, as tensions between the United States and Libya over the Gulf of Sidra mounted, the Soviets built on a priority basis Libya's first SA-5 surface-to-air missile complex to defend the Gulf. In April and May, Soviet technicians urgently repaired the missile defenses that had been damaged in the US raids on Tripoli and Benghazi, according to [redacted]

to the Libyan Air Force, probably man some Libyan surface-to-air missile units, and serve as instructors. Damascus, Libya's closest ally, provides these personnel as part of its broad cooperation with Tripoli. In return, we believe Tripoli has provided Syria with financial support and military equipment, together worth as much as \$1 billion. This assistance is far less than promised but apparently enough to keep a Syrian military contingent in Libya. In addition, Damascus probably values the training its pilots receive—at Tripoli's expense—from the relatively high rate of flying they do in Libya. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Soviets also deploy military ships and aircraft to Libya, sometimes in direct support of Tripoli. A Soviet auxiliary has been in Tripoli for most of 1986, almost certainly relaying intelligence collected from the Soviet Mediterranean fleet on US and other NATO fleets in the area. Soviet IL-38 antisubmarine warfare and reconnaissance aircraft—which have periodically visited Libya since 1981—also have been in Libya for most of this year, [redacted]

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Despite the significant impact the Soviets have on Libya's military readiness, strategy, and tactics, we believe they do not have a significant role in Tripoli's decisions regarding when and where to employ its forces. In our view, Libyan leader Qadhafi tries to protect his independence of action from Moscow and consciously avoids the stigma of being seen as a Soviet puppet. [redacted]

[redacted] suggests that, within days after the US air raids on Libya last April, Damascus may have dispatched an additional contingent (probably 10 to 20 strong) of MIG-23 pilots to Libya. The airstrikes also have prompted a marked expansion in the role of Syrian Air Force personnel. [redacted]

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Syrians had previously operated as a self-contained squadron, with its own pilots, technicians, and ground controllers, based exclusively at Benina. Now they are flying some missions with mixed sections of Libyan- and Syrian-piloted fighters, sometimes with Libyan ground controllers working with Syrian pilots or vice

### **The Expanding Syrian Role**

Next to the Soviets, the Syrian contingent plays the most important role in the Libyan military. [redacted]

[redacted] Syrians are seconded

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versa. [redacted]  
[redacted]

[redacted] may also support some  
Libyan surface-to-air missile units, but details are  
sketchy. [redacted]  
[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

which Libya pays tens of millions of dollars annually.  
Most of these are representatives of manufacturers of  
military equipment Libya has purchased. We have no  
information to suggest that they man any weapons on  
Libya's behalf, but some may provide important  
technical advice or maintenance assistance in a crisis.

**French.** [redacted]  
120 technicians from Dassault Breguet help maintain  
Libya's Mirage aircraft; 60 Thomson CSF personnel  
work with the Libyan Navy (probably on La  
Combattante missile boats) and with the Libyan Air  
Defense Force (on radar and on Crotale surface-to-air  
missiles); 120 CAP International representatives  
conduct general maintenance for the Libyan Air  
Force; about five Aerospatiale technicians work with  
Super Frelon helicopters; and about 15 Matra  
technicians work on Otomat and Matra missiles.

**Other Foreign Personnel**

Many other groups of foreigners are in Libya  
providing maintenance and training on military  
equipment as part of contractual arrangements for

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[redacted]

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[redacted]

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[redacted]

Czechs are building a large vehicle or tank repair facility near Tripoli, and nearly 600 Yugoslavs have been working on the naval academy at Sidi Bilal, according to the Yugoslav press. These numbers fluctuate widely as contracts are signed and completed and are not included in the totals in the accompanying table. [redacted]

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**Looking Ahead**

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We anticipate that a large foreign contingent will continue to support the Libyan military for the foreseeable future. Qadhafi almost certainly is uncomfortable with his dependence on foreigners and has spoken often of reducing the foreign presence in Libya. Nevertheless, he has no alternative if he wants to maintain the current level of readiness. Libya's manpower pool is largely undereducated, and there is an ingrained bias against manual labor, which is how Libyans regard even high-technology maintenance. We believe Libyan forces could operate at present levels for only about a month without widespread foreign support. [redacted]

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**Construction Teams.** Besides the foreigners [redacted] groups of several hundred foreign workers—usually civilians—are scattered around Libya in military construction projects. For example,

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[redacted]

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Qadhafi, if he chose, could selectively expel some groups of foreigners. He could be driven to this by economic difficulties or by diplomatic strains with sponsoring governments (although his practice has been to try to keep his foreign technicians isolated from foreign policy issues). Of the groups currently in Libya, only the loss of the Soviets would have a devastating impact on Libya's military effectiveness, particularly since Moscow almost certainly would not allow them to be replaced by other East European personnel. Most of Libya's arsenal is Soviet built and probably cannot be maintained well by Westerners without Soviet cooperation and parts support. [ ]

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Meanwhile, Tripoli's fears of renewed military pressure from the United States probably will prompt it to try to increase the number of foreigners working with Libya's forces. Tripoli probably will ask Syria, for example, to help man some of the surface-to-air missile units that [ ] have been set up since the US air raids. [ ]

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[ ] In addition, Tripoli's recent purchases of new Soviet equipment—particularly air defense command and control systems—probably include provision for new arrivals of Soviet technicians and advisers. Tripoli's tight budget, however, is likely to prevent a significant increase in support from other countries—primarily West European—which provide technicians and advisers in deals that are strictly business.

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